

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-10 L-02

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4649

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: LIBERAL CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION PROSPECTS

REF: LONDON 13030

SUMMARY: VALIANT EFFORTS NOTWITHSTANDING, LIBERAL CAMPAIGN DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE CAUGHT FIRE AND IT SEEMS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT PARTY WILL ACHIEVE "BREAK-THROUGH" THORPE HAS SO FREQUENTLY PORTRAYED AS JUST AROUND THE CORNER. END SUMMARY.

1. CAMPAIGN CHARACTERISTICS: LIBERALS HAVE PUT MAJOR

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EMPHASIS ON THORPE, SPENDING LARGE AMOUNT OF FUNDS ON

TRANSPORTING HIM AND ACCOMPANYING NEWSMAN BY FLEET OF HELICOPTERS, BRINGING HIM TO MORNING PRESS CONFERENCE IN LONDON VIA CLOSED-CIRCUIT TV, AND PROVIDING NEWSMEN WITH BOTH COFFEE AND FREE BUS TRANSPORTATION TO ATTEND PRESS CONFERENCES. PERHAPS PARTIALLY AS A RESULT OF THIS KIND OF LARGESSE, THORPE HAS BEEN HANDLED SYMPATHETICALLY BY MEDIA AND APPEARS TO BE GENERALLY ACCEPTED AS MOST ATTRACTIVE OF CANDIDATES. ELEGANCE OF HIS LANGUAGE, HIS SENSE OF STYLE, WIT AND HUMOR HAVE, OF COURSE, ALSO HELPED.

2. ANOTHER ATTRIBUTE OF LIBERAL CAMPAIGN IS ENTHUSIASTIC ACTIVITY OF YOUNGER MEMBERS AND CANDIDATES, MANY OF WHOM HAVE POLITICAL EXPERIENCE AT COUNCIL LEVEL AND ARE NOW TRYING TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN PARLIAMENT.

3. CAMPAIGN THEMES: MAJOR THRUST OF LIBERAL CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN THE FAILURE OF BOTH LABOR AND CONSERVATIVES TO COME UP WITH SOLUTION TO BRITAIN'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. THORPE HAS CLAIMED LIBERALS HAVE RIGHT TO LARGER ROLE IN AFFAIRS OF THE NATION BECAUSE OF THEIR HAVING RECEIVED 6 MILLION POPULAR VOTES IN FEBRUARY, APPROXIMATELY 20 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL. THORPE SUGGESTS THAT LIBERAL VOTE IS CONTINUING TO GROW AND THAT WHEN LIBERALS RECEIVE 28-30 PERCENT OF THE VOTE THEY WILL HAVE "BROKEN" DISASTEROUS TWO-PARTY SYSTEM AND RECEIVE A FAIRER SHARE IN PARLIAMENTARY SEATS.

4. ON SPECIFIC ISSUES, THORPE SAYS WHATEVER PARTY THAT WINS IN ELECTION WILL HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO IMPOSE STATUTORY LIMITS ON BOTH WAGES AND PRICES. ON NATIONAL UNITY THEME, THORPE SAYS UNITY IMPOSSIBLE UNDER TORIES, WHOSE PAST POLICIES LED DIRECTLY TO CONFRONTATION WITH UNIONS; WITH LABOR, UNITY IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE OF LABOR'S DEPENDENCE ON TRADE UNIONS. ON THORNY COALITION QUESTION, THORPE CONSIDERS COALITION "HIGHLY UNLIKELY" OUTCOME OF ELECTION AND SAYS LIBERALS WILL SUPPORT FROM BACK BENCH THOSE POLICIES IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST, REGARDLESS OF WHO WINS.

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5. LIBERAL APPEAL: LIBERALS ARE ACHIEVING SOME SUCCESS WITH VOTERS WHO ARE DISENCHANTED WITH BOTH LABOR AND CONSERVATIVES. AS IN FEBRUARY, THE LIBERALS ARE PROBABLY DOING VERY WELL WITH YOUNG VOTERS AND PERHAPS, BECAUSE OF THEIR MIX OF SOCIALISTIC REFORMS, ERUDITION AND TRADITION, WITH SOME OF THE INTELLECTUALS. THE LIBERALS WILL ALSO CONTINUE TO BENEFIT IN SOME CASES FROM THE

VOTER WHO IS VOTING AGAINST RATHER THAN FOR, THE STRATEGIC VOTER.

6. ELECTION PROSPECTS: SEVERAL FACTORS APPEAR, AT THIS TIME TO CAST SOME DOUBT ON THORPE'S PREDICTIONS OF A BREAK-THROUGH. THERE IS THE UPSURGE OF NATIONALISM IN SCOTLAND WHICH HURTS THE LIBERALS INDIRECTLY BY FORECLOSING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE LIBERALS TO TAKE SEATS FROM EITHER LABOR OR THE CONSERVATIVES THERE; SNP APPEARS LIKELY TO GAIN AT CONSERVATIVE AND PERHAPS LABOR EXPENSE,

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REDUCING TOTAL LIBERAL VOTES. UNDOUBTEDLY, THERE HAS BEEN SOME DRIFTING AWAY FROM THE LIBERAL VOTE ELSEWHERE SINCE BOTH CONSERVATIVE AND LABOR CANVASSERS REPORT DOOR-STOOP INDICATIONS OF REGAINING VOTERS LOST IN FEBRUARY. PUBLIC OPINION POLLS CONTINUE REPORTING LIBERAL SUPPORT IN THE RANGE OF 20 PERCENT OR SLIGHTLY UNDER AND, WHILE THORPE BELIEVES THE ACTUAL VOTE WILL BE 5 PERCENT OR MORE HIGHER THAN THE POLLS SHOW (USING FEBRUARY POLLS AND ACHIEVEMENTS AS A PARALLEL), THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE, STATISTICAL OR OTHERWISE, TO SUBSTANTIATE HIS HOPES.

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7. FINALLY, THERE IS THE OVERALL ELECTION APATHY, CONCERNING TO LABOR AND COMFORTING TO THE CONSERVATIVES, WHO MAY DO BEST IN A LOW VOTE. LIBERALS, LIKE LABOR, WOULD PROFIT MOST FROM A HIGH LEVEL OF VOTING. THE ELECTORATE, HOWEVER, HAS SHOWED A LACK OF INTEREST IN THE ELECTIONS AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE RELATIVELY HIGH LEVEL OF "DON'T KNOWS" IN THE LATEST POLLS. AT LEAST SOME OF THE "DON'T KNOWS" WILL BE "DIDN'T VOTES," AND THE LIBERALS DON'T SEEM TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN ATTRACTING SUPPORT FROM THIS GROUP. PARENTHETICALLY, BREWERY OFFICIALS REPORT A HIGH LEVEL OF VISITATION IN PUBS PRECISELY AT THE TIMES OF ELECTION BROADCASTS ON TELEVISION.

8. THUS, THE LIBERALS MAY WELL SEE THEIR HIGH HOPES FOR MORE SEATS AND AN EVEN LARGER SHARE IN THE POPULAR VOTE DASHED, AND THEY MAY HAVE TO BE SATISFIED WITH NO APPRECIABLE GAINS OR EVEN SOME LOSS.

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